

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 101 250

CG 009 509

AUTHOR Adams, Gerald R.; LaVoie, Joseph C.
TITLE Parental Expectations of Educational and
Personal-Social Performance and Childrearing Patterns
as a Function of Attractiveness, Sex, and Conduct of
Child.
PUB DATE May 74
NOTE 26p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the
Midwest Psychological Association (Chicago, Illinois,
May 1974)
AVAILABLE FROM Joseph C. LaVoie, Department of Psychology,
University of Nebraska at Omaha, Omaha, Nebraska
68101
EDRS PRICE MF-\$0.76 HC-\$1.95 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS *Cultural Factors; Elementary School Students;
*Expectation; *Parent Reaction; *Physical
Characteristics; Research Projects; Sex Stereotypes;
*Socialization; Student Behavior

ABSTRACT

The influence of a child's sex, physical attractiveness, and conduct on parental expectancies of academic and social performance as well as socialization practices of the child's parents were assessed by comparing parental responses on these measures after reading a child's report card. Parents of elementary-age school children were asked to read a student progress report for a child whose conduct ratings were good or poor. Attached to the report was a color photograph of a child who had been previously judged to be of high or low physical attractiveness. After reading the student progress report, parents were asked to rate the child on a number of academic, social, and childrearing measures. Conduct of the child significantly influenced parental expectancies on most measures. Physical attractiveness was a factor in ratings on certain social factors and sex of the child seemed to bias ratings on vocational attainment. The results were discussed in terms of sociocultural expectancies. (Author)

ED101250

PARENTAL EXPECTATIONS OF EDUCATIONAL AND PERSONAL-SOCIAL
PERFORMANCE AND CHILDREARING PATTERNS AS A FUNCTION OF
ATTRACTIVENESS, SEX, AND CONDUCT OF CHILD¹

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

Gerald R. Adams

Joseph C. LaVoie²

University of Nebraska at Omaha

The presence of a "physical attractiveness stereotype" (i.e., the notion that physically attractive individuals are "advantaged" because of the positive traits assigned to them and the favorable social perceptions held by others) has been gaining support in the physical attraction literature. In their recent review, Berscheid and Walster (1973) concluded that people who vary in physical attractiveness are responded to differentially and this response pervades all facets of life including childhood. According to Berscheid and Walster (1973) differential expectations are held toward children who vary in physical attractiveness, which suggests that these children may experience different socialization practices.

Evidence of such a physical attractive bias is more extensive for teachers than parents. However, Walker (1963) reported that ratings assigned by parents to nursery school boys with mesomorphic physiques were more positive than ratings given to endomorphic or ectomorphic physiques. Additional support for the assumption that physical attractiveness of the child may influence socialization practices appeared in a study by Dion (1972). Using female college students who read behavioral descriptions of a mild or severe transgression by a child taken from the teacher's record, Dion (1972) tested the assumption that parents view a transgression by an attractive child as due to a bad mood, whereas the same transgression committed by an unattractive child is the result of an antisocial trait.

(Dion's rationale for the use of college-females rather than actual parents was that women of approximately this age group are mothers and elementary school teachers). A photograph of the child, previously judged to be attractive or unattractive, was attached to the behavioral description. Dion found that attractive children were rated as less deviant when the transgression was severe, while the unattractive were judged as anti-social and more dishonest. But there were no differences in the punishment advocated for the offenses committed by these children. Although physical attractiveness has not been a variable of concern in the child-rearing literature, sex differences apparently result in differential practices, such as socialization for aggression (Sears, Maccoby, & Levin, 1953) and permissiveness (Rothbart & Maccoby, 1966).

The data supporting differential socialization for the attractive and unattractive children in another social setting--the school--are somewhat more definitive. Male and female teachers, who were asked by Clifford and Walster (1973) to make several predictions about a child after viewing the child's progress report with an attached photograph of an attractive or unattractive child, gave higher ratings on ability measures to the more attractive children regardless of the sex of the child or the sex of the teacher. In an extension of this research LaVoie and Adams (e.g., Adams & LaVoie, 1974; LaVoie & Adams, 1973), also varied the conduct level of the child. The addition of this information generally negated any effects due to attractiveness, with the result that the child's conduct became the influential determinant of the teachers' predictions of academic ability, work habits, and attitudes. While the attractiveness or conduct effect apparently is not mediated by sex of child, girls seem to be more advantaged in elementary school (Maccoby, 1966).

These studies provide some insight into the effects of physical attractiveness as a mediating variable in socialization, but generalizations are necessarily limited. Dion (1972) excluded the father component, in the form of college males, from her sample. One can also question whether college females will respond in a manner similar to mothers since females in a mother's role are likely to respond differently from females who are not mothers. Information on the child's conduct, which appears to be an important variable, was not included in the Clifford and Walster (1973) study, and the LaVoie and Adams' (1973) sample did not include enough male teachers to verify Clifford and Walster's finding that sex of teacher was not a significant factor in the ratings.

The aim of the present study was to investigate further the effects of physical attractiveness, conduct, and sex of the child, as well as sex of parent, on socialization practices and parental expectations of the child in an educational and personal-social setting. Mothers and fathers of elementary school-age-children were presented with a student progress report for a boy or girl whose conduct was good or poor, and to which was attached a color photograph of the child. The parent was asked to read the progress report and then rate the child on several school and personal-social measures as well as determine certain socialization practices which had been used with the child. On the basis of the previous discussion it was predicted that:

- (1) Parental expectations are higher for physically attractive children than unattractive children.
- (2) Conduct of the child is more influential than physical attractiveness in determining parental expectations.

- (3) Mothers and fathers do not differ in their expectations toward attractive and unattractive children.

Method

Subjects

The subjects were largely middle class parents (based on the Warner, Meeker and Eell's occupational rating scale, Miller, 1964) consisting of 106 mothers and 91 fathers of elementary school children. The mean age of the parents was 42.5 years ($s = 5.4$), and all parents had been married for a period of eight or more years. The average family size was 2.5 children. The sample was obtained by undergraduate students in four education courses who were asked to distribute the packet of materials (i.e., a copy of the student progress report with the attached color photograph and the parent questionnaire) to parents (except the student's own parents) in a neighborhood. This procedure permitted a good sampling of a broad spectrum of the middle class population. Of the 260 questionnaires distributed, 197 or 75% were returned. The return among mothers, as evident from the sample size, was slightly higher ($n = 106$) than the return for fathers ($n = 91$). Comparisons of demographic characteristics of those parents who returned the questionnaire with those who did not return the questionnaire showed no significant differences.

Student Progress Report

This form, commonly labeled a report card, was constructed to portray an above average student (mostly A's and B's) in subjects such as language-arts, mathematics, reading, and spelling. For the good conduct student, grades in personal and social growth, work habits, and attitudes were A's and B's with a few C's. The good conduct student's report showed few absences or times tardy, while the poor conduct student report showed

grades of D's and F's with a few C's for personal and social growth, work habits and attitudes and contained numerous absences and incidences of tardiness. These manipulations were designed to present a student who was well adjusted in school or not well adjusted in school (had a conduct problem), but these students did not differ in academic ability. The name on the student report was that of a boy or girl in the elementary grades.

Student Photograph

Attached to each student progress report was a colored photograph (head and neck only) of a fifth grade boy or girl. The photographs were previously rated as high or low on physical attractiveness by a group of 20 college students who agreed on over 95% of the ratings. Three boy's and three girl's photographs provided a pool from which a particular photograph to be attached to the student report was randomly selected. This random selection provided an additional control for those subtle features of attractiveness which were not controlled in the photograph (all photographs were of children who had light colored hair and did not wear glasses). Fifth-grade students were selected for the photographs because the baby-like features which make all children attractive have disappeared by this time.

Parent Questionnaire

This instrument consisted of a series of questions for which the parent had to make predictions concerning the behavior of the child named on the student progress report. The items were grouped into three categories. The first category, labeled school measures, asked the parent to rate, on an equal-appearing interval scale, the following: IQ (1--an IQ of 90-100 to 5--an IQ of over 130); grade point average (1--a GPA of 1.5-2.0 to 5--a GPA of 3.5-4.0); percentile rank in class (1--below the 25th percentile

to 4--above the 75th percentile); post high school training (1--finish high school to 6--M.D. or Ph.D. degree); teacher involvement with the child (1--no involvement to 5--actively involved); teacher permissiveness toward the child (1--extremely permissive to 5--extremely restrictive); work habits of the child (1--very poor to 5--very good); school attitudes of the child (1--negative to 5--very positive), and creativity (1--not creative to 5--highly creative). The category labeled personal and social behaviors asked the parents to rate the child on: peer relations (1--very poor to 5--very good); popularity (1--very unpopular to 5--very popular); election as a class representative (1--would receive less than 20% of the votes to 5--would receive 50% or more of the votes); leadership (1--little or none to 5--very high), and personal attitudes (1--problem child to 5--very well behaved). The third category, consisting of childrearing measures, requested ratings on: parental interest in the child (1--negative to 5--highly interested); social class of the family (1--lower class to 4--upper middle class); parental discipline practices (1--high use of physical punishment to 5--high use of reasoning); parental permissiveness toward the child (1--extremely permissive to 5--extremely restrictive), and the pleasantness of an outing with this child (0--extremely unpleasant to 10--extremely pleasant).

Procedure

Each parent was given a student progress report with the attached photograph, the parent questionnaire, and a brief letter stating the purpose of the survey, by an undergraduate student. The students had previously discussed this area of research in their classes and had received some training in research methods. The letter accompanying the assessment materials requested the parent's assistance in evaluating the usefulness

of the student progress report for parents in evaluating the progress of their child's academic progress. The letter stated that the purpose of the questionnaire was to enable the researchers to assess the amount of information obtained by the parent from the student progress report and the interpretability of this report. Parents were instructed to read carefully the student progress report for the fifth grade child, note the attached photograph, and then complete the information requested on the questionnaire. A separate packet of materials was given to each parent and the letter specifically requested that the parent complete the questionnaire independently of and without consulting or discussing the report with the other parent. The undergraduate students collecting the data also emphasized this instruction on independent assessment to each parent and explained why independent assessment was necessary.

Results

A separate 2 (Sex of Parent) X 2 (Sex of Child) X 2 (Level of Attractiveness) X 2 (Conduct Level) unequal n Analysis of Variance was computed for each of the measures. Significant interactions were evaluated with simple effects analyses. The significant main effects ($p < .05$) for these measures are found in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

School Related Measures

The pattern of results, as evident in Table 1, indicates that conduct of the child, not physical attractiveness, significantly influenced parental predictions of academic performance, supporting the differential prediction which was made. Children with good conduct were rated higher

on all measures except IQ and creativity. Poor conduct children were rated somewhat higher in IQ ($\bar{X} = 3.35$) than good conduct children ($\bar{X} = 3.24$) and significantly higher in creativity.

Although the sex of the child influenced parental ratings on some measures (i.e., boys were given higher percentile rankings in class, and predicted to obtain more advanced post high school education and a higher status vocation), conduct was an interacting factor for percentile rank and post high school training, but vocational status was further influenced by the child's physical attractiveness.

Parental attitudes toward girls who depart from cultural expectations regarding behavior are apparent in the ratings of percentile rank in class and post high school training. Poor conduct girls were rated significantly lower in percentile rank in class than poor conduct boys ($F = 8.14$, $df = 1/181$, $p < .01$), and good conduct girls ($F = 14.24$, $df = 1/181$, $p < .01$), according to a simple effects analysis. This interaction is plotted in Figure 1. A similar pattern of sex differences appeared for the post high school training measure. Less post high school training was predicted for

Insert Figure 1 about here

poor conduct girls than poor conduct males ($F = 19.96$, $df = 1/181$, $p < .01$). But both poor conduct females ($F = 23.91$, $df = 1/181$, $p < .01$) and males ($F = 4.33$, $df = 1/181$, $p < .05$) were predicted to acquire less additional training than their good conduct counterparts.

Physical attractiveness appeared to mediate the effects of conduct on vocational attainment as can be noted in Figure 2, although sex differences

Insert Figure 2 about here

were present among good and poor conduct children. Poor conduct girls were predicted to attain higher status vocations when they also were attractive rather than unattractive ($F = 3.91$, $df = 1/181$, $p < .05$), whereas attractiveness did not influence the vocational ratings given to good conduct girls ($F < 1$). However, boys regardless of their physical attractiveness or conduct were given higher vocational ratings.

According to the perception of parents, the academically capable child is one who is well behaved in school. Physical attractiveness influenced parent judgments only to the extent that attractive children were assumed to acquire higher status jobs. A sex bias was quite evident in that girls were not expected to obtain extensive post high school training or a high status vocation.

Personal and Social Measures

Attractiveness and conduct influenced parental perceptions of personal and social behaviors of the child. Good conduct children were rated as more popular, more likely to be elected class representative, and more positive in personal attitudes (see Table 1). But mothers' and fathers' perceptions were differentially affected by the child's conduct. The sex of parent interaction for the popularity measure is presented in Figure 3. Mothers rated the poor conduct girl lower on popularity ($F = 9.93$, $df = 1/181$, $p < .01$) and leadership ($F = 9.72$, $df = 1/181$, $p < .01$) than fathers.

Insert Figure 3 about here

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Both parents rated the good conduct child as more popular and more capable of leadership. However, poor conduct children, if physically attractive, were rated higher on personal attitudes ($F = 101.70$, $df = 1/181$, $p < .01$).

Childrearing Measures

Conduct of the child again was a major determinant of parental ratings, but sex of the child and attractiveness were interacting factors. As noted in Figure 4, physically attractive males were given a higher social

Insert Figure 4 about here

designation than attractive girls ($F = 74.58$, $df = 1/181$, $p < .01$), but this sex difference was not present among the low attractive children. Parent subjects in this study also rated parents of high attractive boys as making greater use of reasoning, whereas more stringent measures were assigned to parents of high attractive girls ($F = 3.89$, $df = 1/181$, $p < .05$). This

Insert Figure 5 about here

interaction effect is plotted in Figure 5.

Interestingly, parents of good conduct boys were assumed to have used more severe forms of discipline than parents of poor conduct boys ($F = 4.95$, $df = 1/181$, $p < .05$). Parents of good conduct girls were rated as less severe in their discipline practices than parents of poor conduct girls ($F = 4.11$, $df = 1/181$, $p < .01$). Apparently parents feel that stringent discipline is more necessary to control boys than girls.

The pervasiveness of conduct on parental ratings of children is most evident in the parents' rating of the pleasantness of an outing with

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

the child they were evaluating. This effect is presented in Figure 6.

 Insert Figure 6 about here

A proposed outing was perceived to be more pleasurable with a good conduct child regardless of whether the child was attractive ($F = 44.61$, $df = 1/181$, $p < .01$) or unattractive ($F = 43.08$, $df = 1/181$, $p < .01$).

Discussion

Among parents, the physical attractiveness stereotype does not seem to influence greatly their expectancies of academic performance in children or the childrearing practices of the parents of these children. These findings do not conflict necessarily with the physical attractiveness stereotype, rather it appears that this stereotype is more apparent in certain situations. In the present study, for example, attractive children were rated more popular, more likely to be elected to a class office, and to have more positive personal attitudes than less attractive children. This perception seems to reflect parents' awareness that physical attractiveness is a primary determinant of success in the social world, especially in obtaining social support from peers. Therefore, physical attractiveness may bias parents to the extent that they provide more encouragement for their attractive children to participate in social activities. This differential reinforcement resulting from physical attractiveness undoubtedly has an influence on self concept formation.

Some writers have suggest a qualitative difference in the physical attractiveness stereotype for males and females. Byrne, London, and Reeves (1968) found that attractive college males were perceived to be less intelligent and moral while the converse occurred for females. This

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

sex difference was not apparent in the present study where conduct of the child interacted with level of attractiveness. Attractive males were given more positive ratings than females and were expected to be somewhat less severely disciplined. Berscheid and Walster (1973) have argued that a physical attractiveness stereotype is determined most parsimoniously through main effects rather than interactions. If one accepts their argument, there is little support for the presence of a physical attractiveness stereotype in this study.

Overall, conduct of the child emerged as the most pervasive factor influencing parent ratings on school and personal-social measures as well as childrearing. Further, most of the significant interactions involved conduct. One could argue for the presence of a conduct stereotype. That is, good conduct children were rated more favorably on most measures. However, poor conduct girls generally received lower ratings than poor conduct males suggesting that girls who might be characterized as conduct disorders are viewed more negatively than boys with a similar designation. The societal stigma associated with a conduct problem girl appears to be quite strong. Perhaps parents associate behavior at this age with sexual permissiveness later, which is a cultural taboo especially among the middle class. This may explain why the parent raters attributed more stringent discipline measures to parents of attractive girls. The parent raters may have expected more problems from this girl. When all of the evidence is collated, there is much support for the prediction that conduct of the child is more influential in parental expectations than physical attractiveness.

The problem at hand is that of explaining why conduct is such a pervasive factor. One plausible explanation is that which contrasts

physical attractiveness versus interpersonal attractiveness. Physical attractiveness may influence expectancy in an interpersonal situation because of the stereotype, but when additional information is available, in the form of interpersonal factors, this input seems to erase the stereotype effect. Thus, while Clifford and Walster (1973) reported that physical attractiveness of the child influenced teacher ratings, LaVoie and Adams (i.e., Adams & LaVoie, 1974; LaVoie & Adams, 1973) found conduct of the child to be more influential. Social learning is undoubtedly an important factor. Teachers, parents, peers, etc. quite readily learn that rewards, in terms of satisfaction, from an interpersonal experience with a well behaved individual will be greater, perhaps because one can predict with greater accuracy how this individual will behave in a given situation. There is less environmental predictability with the poor conduct individual. Cultural influences are also important. Individuals with behavior problems are ascribed negative connotations by society.

Certain characteristics of the child seem to differentially affect mothers' and fathers' expectancies especially in social-personal attainment. On measures of popularity and leadership, mothers seemed to be influenced more by poor conduct, while both sex of the child and conduct were factors in the expectancy of fathers. Mothers predicted less success for the poor conduct child, especially the female, but fathers were of the opinion that poor conduct females would be more popular and more likely to be leaders than poor conduct males. This seemed to be the case only when the poor conduct female was also attractive. It would appear that fathers were biased somewhat by a feminine physical attractiveness stereotype. Fathers may believe that attractive females who deviate from cultural prescription still can be popular.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Sex discrimination still is present among parents today according to the data in this study. Boys were predicted to obtain more post high school education and attain higher status vocations than females regardless of the child's attractiveness or sex of parent, although conduct was a factor. If the parent sample in this study is considered representative of adult society in general, then it would appear that adults really don't believe that females will be as well prepared vocationally as males. This result has some implications for female career preparation, especially if parental support for post high school training is lacking.

In summary it seems that parental expectations with respect to academic and person-social performance as well as childrearing practices are influenced by sex and conduct of the child. However, there is the matter of external validity. While this study has shown that parent attitudes about a child's performance are biased by certain factors, this does not mean necessarily that parents actually behave differentially toward a child who differs in the characteristics manipulated in this study. The present investigation does not present data on parent behavior. Other data, however, do provide a basis for making this inference. Sex of child is one factor influencing parent behavior (e.g., Rothbart & Maccoby, 1966; Moss, 1967). As yet, there is not much evidence that adults behave differentially toward attractive and unattractive children; although Lajba and Adams (1973) found some evidence of a physical attractiveness bias. Their classroom observations of kindergarten, fourth, and seventh grade teachers showed that these teachers gave more supportive statements to the physically attractive child. Good conduct children also seem to have favor with the teacher (Beilin, 1959). But more conclusive evidence, in the form of a well designed observational study, for this inferred link between an expressed parental expectancy toward the child and differential behavior is needed.

References

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

- Adams, G. R., & LaVoie, J. C. The effects of student sex, conduct, and facial attractiveness on teacher expectancy. Education, 1974, in press.
- Berscheid, E., & Walster, E. Physical attractiveness. In L. Berkowitz (Ed.), Advances in experimental social psychology, New York: Academic Press, Vol. VII, 1973.
- Byrne, D., London, O., & Reeves, K. The effects of physical attractiveness, sex, and attitude similarity on interpersonal attraction. Journal of Personality, 1968, 36, 259-271.
- Clifford, M. M., & Walster, E. The effect of physical attractiveness on teacher expectations. Sociology of Education, 1973, 46, 248-258.
- Dion, K. K. Physical attractiveness and evaluations of children's transgressions. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 1972, 24, 207-213.
- Lajba, S. & Adams, G. R. A naturalistic observation study of kindergarten, fourth, and seventh grade teachers and their interactions with students. The effects of conduct, verbal expressiveness, and attractiveness on teacher-student interactions. Unpublished manuscript, University of Nebraska at Omaha, 1973.
- LaVoie, J. C., & Adams, G. R. Pygmalion in the classroom: An experimental investigation of physical attractiveness, sex, and conduct on teacher expectations. Paper presented at the Midwestern Psychological Association, Chicago, May, 1973.
- Maccoby, E. E. The development of sex differences. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1966.

Moss, H. A. Sex, age, and state as determinants of mother-infant interaction. Merrill-Palmer Quarterly, 1967, 13, 19-37.

Rothbart, M. K. & Maccoby, E. E. Parents' differential reactions to sons and daughters. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 1966, 4, 237-243.

Sears, R. R., Maccoby, E. E., & Levin, H. Patterns of child rearing, Evanston, Ill.: Row & Peterson, 1957.

Walker, R. N. Body build and behavior in young children: II. Body build and parents' ratings. Child Development, 1963, 34, 1-23.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Footnotes

¹The authors greatly appreciate the assistance of the students enrolled in Human Development and Learning who assisted in the data collection.

²Requests for reprints should be addressed to Joseph C. LaVoie, Department of Psychology, University of Nebraska at Omaha, Omaha Nebraska 68101.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Means and F Ratios for Parent Predictions of School, Personal-Social, and Childrearing

Physical

	Sex of Parent		Sex of Child		Attractiveness		Conduct	
	Male $\bar{X}$	Female $\bar{X}$	Male $\bar{X}$	Female $\bar{X}$	Low $\bar{X}$	High $\bar{X}$	Poor $\bar{X}$	Good $\bar{X}$
<u>School Related Measures</u>								
Grade Point Average							3.57	3.89
Percentile Rank							3.43	3.73
Post High School Training							2.93	3.93
Vocation							4.32	5.54
Teacher Involvement							3.23	3.81
Teacher Permissiveness							3.32	3.09
Work Habit							2.91	4.56
School Attitudes							2.58	4.10
Potential Creativity							3.81	3.59
<u>Personal and Social Behaviors</u>								
Peer Relations							2.34	4.28
Popularity							2.46	3.66
Class Representative							1.70	3.10
Leadership							2.55	3.68
Personal Attitudes							1.62	3.97
<u>Childrearing Measures</u>								
Parental Interest	3.47	3.63	(4.29)				2.68	4.09
Social Class							3.12	3.57
Parental Discipline							1.96	3.15
Parental Permissiveness							5.24	7.76
Interpersonal Experience								

*All F ratios are for $df=1/181$, $p<.05$

Figure Captions

- Figure 1. Sex of child X conduct interaction for percentile rank in class
- Figure 2. Sex of child X attractiveness X conduct interaction for predicted vocation
- Figure 3. Sex of parent X sex of child, X conduct interaction for popularity rating
- Figure 4. Sex of child X attractiveness interaction for rating of social class
- Figure 5. Sex of child X attractiveness interaction for rating of parental discipline
- Figure 6. Sex of child X attractiveness X conduct interaction for rated pleasantness of an outing

BEST COPY AVAILABLE











